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C O N F I D E N T I A L SARAJEVO 000169

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SUBJECT: BOSNIA - NATO PARP ASSESSMENT TEAM DELIVERS
SCATHING ASSESSMENT

REF: A. SARAJEVO 96 B. PODGORICA 27

Classified By: DCM Judith Cefkin for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. In a meeting with the NATO Ambassadors' Forum on February 11, Frank Boland, the Director of NATO's Force Planning Directorate, previewed his office's upcoming PARP assessment of Bosnia. Boland warned the international community that the assessment, to be released February 26, of Bosnia's defense planning and reform progress will be negative. Boland did not pull any punches, making clear that there was no prospects for Bosnia having made substantial progress on its NATO partnership goals before the March 11 North Atlantic Council discussion on Bosnia. Although defense reform is often cited as a bright spot in Bosnia's reform progress, Boland said, progress has stalled due to lack of money and the incapacity of Bosnia's leaders to make the political compromises necessary to move forward. END SUMMARY.

"JOBS FOR TEN THOUSAND, AND NOT MUCH ELSE"

¶2. (SBU) Oversized, bogged down by unneeded, unwanted and decrepit assets, Bosnia's Armed Forces lack the financial means to properly train and equip its army to transition it to a modern operational force, Boland said. The government has funded the Armed Forces at a level so low that they can do little more than meet their personnel costs, said Boland. He noted, as just one example, that the military has to cannibalize part of its fleet of vehicles, which are essential equipment for moving its troops and equipment around, to keep the other part of the fleet running. The failure of Bosnia's leaders to resolve outstanding defense property issues means that the Armed Forces can not divest itself of more than 120 unwanted military sites and arsenals of unneeded, old and dangerous weapons and ammunition. This means that nearly 1,700 infantry soldiers are solely dedicated to guarding unwanted assets, and are not available for any kind of military training. Besides Bosnia's success in deploying modest contributions to Iraq (with significant U.S. support), Boland said, "we can regard the Armed Forces as employment for 10,000 men and not much else."

POOR PROSPECTS OF MEETING PARTNERSHIP GOALS

¶3. (SBU) While providing jobs for former soldiers of Bosnia's separate entity armies has been good for keeping "social order," Boland said, it does not help Bosnia meet its partnership goals or defense planning objectives. The Ministry of Defense is very good at developing action plans he said, but any goal that requires equipment or political compromise is almost impossible for Bosnia to meet. He added that, ironically, four percent of the defense budget went unspent last year, which is a substantial portion of the

non-wage discretionary budget -- a sign that the Ministry lacks the capacity to decide on what pressing needs it should spend its limited resources. The Armed Forces are facing even tougher times ahead, he added. The 2009 law on salaries will crunch the defense budget even more, and the projected retirement of 2,800 soldiers in 2010 will create costs for the military as it must help the old soldiers transition to civilian life and focus on recruiting new ones.

NOT TO MENTION THE POLITICS OF FORCE STRUCTURE

14. (SBU) Bosnia's force structure is also a problem, Boland said. Bosnia's Armed Forces is unwieldy, oversized, and structured to avoid ethnic integration of infantry battalions. Boland understood that this arrangement was part of the political compromise required to unify Bosnia's separate armies in 2005, but said that it makes no sense for a modern army seeking to transform. This will have to be dealt with eventually, he said, but cautioned that the international community will have to think carefully about when the right time to address this issue will be, given the political situation in Bosnia. He explained that reforming the current force structure will be a political flash point.

"A TIME FOR BLUNT STATEMENTS"

15. (SBU) Much of Bosnia's defense establishment, according to Boland, seems to believe that defense reform was finished when Bosnia created a single Ministry of Defense and command structure out of the separate entity armies in 2005. They don't understand that there is a long, long road ahead if

they are serious about NATO, he said, emphasizing that Bosnia's leaders must do more to demonstrate that they are able to make serious efforts towards necessary changes if the international community is to make the efforts necessary to help them. The reforms ahead will take tough political compromises, much tougher than the current political stalemate over defense property (ref A). Boland said that NATO A/SYG for Defense Policy Jiri Sedivy will be very blunt about this with Bosnia's leaders during his visit to Sarajevo in two weeks, and called for blunt statements from the international community to reinforce the point. Boland concluded: "If Bosnia is serious about NATO, they must decide if they want to be a state or a series of governments competing with each other. And if it's the latter, they should wonder why an organization like NATO would ever accept them."

COMMENT

16. (C) Boland's comments were frank, accurate, and welcome and we understand he delivered the same message to Bosnia's defense establishment during his visit. This underscores why the United States has concluded that Bosnia is not ready for MAP at the April summit. That was a shock to the Bosnians, who see themselves on the same course as Montenegro (which, we note, the same NATO team assessed far more favorably -- ref B), but one they needed to understand that the path to NATO will require true progress and political compromise.

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